

FIRST SOVIET EXPERIMENT

1920 a revolt against the central government broke out in Tabriz, the capital of Iranian Azerbaijan. It was organized by Sheikh Mohammed Khiaban. Khiaban, formerly a deputy to the Majlis, had emigrated to the Caucasus in 1911 and there established contacts with Russian revolutionaries. In 1914 he returned to Tabriz and started underground activity with the aim of liberating Iran from foreign influences. Various radical elements rallied around him. His work was interrupted by the Turkish invasion of Azerbaijan during the war, which resulted in his temporary arrest and confinement in Kars. Released, he returned to Tabriz; and after the end of the war before the authority of the Iranian government was adequately restored in Azerbaijan, he gathered together 800 armed partisans and struck. His political organization was called the National Democratic party. Khiaban's forces disarmed government troops, jailing most of the Iranian officers except those who came over to his side. The Iranian gendarmerie joined the rebels, and the revolt soon spread to the provincial cities of Azerbaijan. Khiaban, who had once been a *mujtahid* (a religious rank), possessed oratorical talents and displayed vigorous political activity. In addressing mass meetings, he demanded a basic transformation of the Iranian state system. Speaking about freedom, better morals, and greater educational facilities, Khiaban asked for a new regime, which in his opinion should be republican. His party's chief organ *Tajaddod* ("Renaissance") printed his speeches and echoed his demands for radical reforms. Struggling against the "reactionary" central government of Vossuq ed-Dowleh, Khiaban and his National Democrats were, in fact,

fighting against the British influence in Iran, as Vossuq was the chief architect of the Anglo-Iranian treaty of 1907.¹⁵ As a result, the province of Azerbaijan was separated from the rest of Iran and assumed the name of Azadistan ("Country of Freedom"). To Soviet Russia these developments were of great interest and importance, especially since Soviet troops simultaneously landed at Enzeli and joined hands with Kuchik Khan. There was a strong temptation to establish contact with the

The Iranian delegation that negotiated the treaty was composed of Vossuq ed-Dowleh, Prime Minister; Akbar Mirza Sarem ed-Dowleh; Firuz Mirza; and Nosrat ed-Dowleh. Later the members of this delegation were accused of having accepted a bribe from the British.